

THE *Theology of Hell*
DOCTRINE
OF

Hell - Torments

Distinctly and Impartially discussed.

*Nolite putare, Patres Conscripti, ut in Scena videtis,
Homines consceleratos impulsu Deorum terri Furia-
rum tædis ardentibus : Sua quemque Fraus, suum
Facinus, suum Scelus, sua Audacia de sanitate ac
mente deturbat. Hæ sunt impiorum Furia, hæ
Flamme, hæ Faces.*

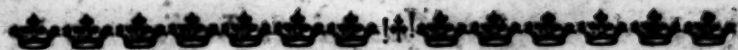
CICERO in L. Pisonem.



L O N D O N,

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T O

Mrs. A. M. L. C.

M A D A M,



S it was a Conversation of your's that led me to consider the Subject of the following Tract more properly than I ever had done, I could think of no one so proper to present it to, in a Dedication, as to yourself.

*W*HETHER its Sentiments agree entirely with your's or no, yet I am almost sure it will be acceptable to you, as it is a sincere and free search after Truth, in a most important Point of Religion; on which, I know, your Heart is truly and wholly fix'd. I could on other Accounts expatiate as much on your singular Merit and Perfections, as any Author whatever; and I believe with more Justice and less Flattery than most Men do, on such Occasions: But as you look upon all other Accomplishments as Trifles, in comparison of true Christian Knowledge and moral Goodness; it would be unjust to set you forth as a Pattern to your Sex, but in those Things which you yourself think really valuable, and in which I think but few equal you.

It is not often, that we see Ladies entering to any Purpose, into a Knowledge of Ethics and Theology: They are generally taken up with the Pomp of Dress, and the Vanity of Play, or some other criminal or trifling Amusement: But the most secret Points of Truth, which lie far out of the common Reach of feminine Capacities, yet wherein you see the Interest of Religion is greatly concerned, are your daily Thought and Study. Can it be for any other End, than to form your Life and Conversation on the solid Principles of unalterable Reason? We are convinced it cannot, by every Thing we see in you. It serves to no Ends of Vanity, gives you no Affectation of a superior Genius; but only helps to distinguish you by a greater Humility and Modesty, by a more rational and exalted Piety towards God, and a more affable, condescending, good-natured Disposition towards all you know and converse with. May you, Madam! long bless the World by so bright an Example of true Religion and Virtue, and thus go on in the Ways of Perfection, till you arrive at the highest Degree of Happiness and Glory, that an Human Creature is capable of!



THE
DOCTRINE
OF

Hell-Torments, &c.



OF all the Doctrines of Religion, there is none so terrifying to the Apprehensions of sinful Men, as that of a Wrath to come. A Worm that *dieth not*, a Fire that is *not quenched*, a Lake of *flaming Brimstone*, and a State of *everlasting Burnings*, are Expressions of Speech so strong and so astonishing, that (let them signify what they will) are enough to make the boldest and most daring Man on Earth *to tremble*; at least, whenever he gives himself leave to think, and to reflect seriously, on the *possible Consequences* of an immoral Life.

To these the corrupt Heart of Man is *so averse*, that it almost unavoidably draws in his Reason to argue and debate about, and even sometimes, perhaps too often, to doubt, the *Truth* and *Reality* of them. Nay, frequently the Justice, and Goodness, and every other

other moral Attribute of the Most High God, are censured and brought into question on this account, in order chiefly *to weaken* the Evidence, and *to lessen* the Certainty, of the Punishment due to Sin, and especially the *Eternity* of it, which is mentioned in almost every Page of Holy Writ, under no less a Sanction of Truth, than that of a demonstrably *Divine Revelation*.

It will therefore be no improper Undertaking, in these licentious Times of Scepticism and Infidelity, to take a *Review* of this Doctrine, tho' often treated of, and to see how far, and in what sense, it may be accounted for, on the undoubted and unshaken Principles of *Natural Religion* : For I am well aware, as that stands on such a Foundation as is necessary and eternal, and therefore *immutably* true ; no Doctrine pretended to be reveal'd, can be either *Divine* or *True*, that in any thing opposes, or disagrees with it.

IN my Way to the Discovery of what is absolutely and invariably so in the Point before us, I cannot but observe, that of all the sacred Truths *written upon the Heart* of Man, there is none more legible and plain than *this* : That as Virtue or moral Goodness hath in the Nature and Reason of things a *Claim* to Reward, so Immorality or Viciousness of Life has no less an *Expectation* of Punishment. Every good Man in every Nation upon Earth, has always *wish'd for*, and *hoped*, and in that Sense *promised* himself, a
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Recompence of future Happiness; and bad Men have always had *their Fears* and *uneasy Apprehensions*, of what may happen hereafter, and at least, that there *may be* a Just and Holy God, who, from an eternal Contrariety of Nature, and an unchangeable Detestation of Evil, or Want of moral Goodness, in his Creatures, will *severely punish*.

THE Doctrine then of a *future State*, in which it shall be equitably retributed to every Man as *his Works* in this Life have been good or evil, is a Dictate of *mere Nature*, not at all derived from *Revelation*, tho' often therein declared and asserted; but plainly deduced from the *Nature* of Things, and from the mutual *Analogy*, or Proportion, they bare one to another: That is, in short, from their *Eternal Truth*, as it exists in the Mind of God; the Knowledge of which we arrive at, by comparing and connecting their natural Fitness or Unfitness, and the several respective Habitudes of them. *The Gentiles* (you know) *having not any Revealed Law, were a Law unto themselves; and shew'd the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their Consciences also bearing witness, and their Thoughts mutually accusing or else excusing them*, as their Actions were morally good or bad; that is, *conformed, or not conformed, to the Ratio or Truth of things*, by which only it was possible for them *to discover what the Will of their Creator was, and what Adjudgment of Re-*
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compence they had hereafter to expect from him.

THE main Difficulty then lies in the *Eternity* or *endless Duration* of the Punishment, so constantly set forth as it is in Holy Scripture: Not indeed so frequently in the Old, as the New Testament, but in both in Terms *equally* forcible and expressive: And this, I cannot but say, is the most *startling*, as well as the most *intricate* Part of Truth. But if right unbiaſſed Reason, enlighten'd by the demonstrable Moral Attributes of GOD, should, on a due Consideration of things, *assert* the same; this Doctrine is not to be objected against, because it is *declared*, *explain'd* or *enforced* in Scripture: For it then draws an Evidence from thence of its Truth and Certainty, as *strong* and *convincing* as the Proof of the Divine Authority of that is.

LET it then be supposed at present, that the future Punishment of Sin will be *eternal*, or *for ever*, as the Scripture speaks; (for this I think ought to be *supposed* at least, seeing this Position is so often maintained therein, till *very clear* and *altogether undeniable* Demonstration be brought to evince the contrary) and the Inference will then be, That its Eternity must either proceed *arbitrarily* from the Will of GOD, or *necessarily* from the Nature of things. If we suppose it from *the Will* of GOD, we are thrown immediately upon unſurmountable Difficulties, which seem to overturn at once its whole Pretension
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to rational Truth; at least, I see *some such* in the Way before me, which I know not how to obviate.

For, if merely the *Divine Will* be the Fountain of Reward and Punishment, or of the Length and Duration of them, whatever the Eternal Truth and Reason of things be; then all future Punishment must be *positive*, and if positive, it cannot but be *limited* and *finite*; if not naturally and in itself, yet considering the Moral Properties of God, it must be so. Supposing otherwise, the Absurdity of the Thing will support the Consequence: For, what an Idea must it give us of *That Being*, who for *mere Will* only, and without *any other Reason*, can damn his *poor, frail*, tho' they be *extreamly sinful, Creatures*, to an Eternity of Pain and Misery, and that too *so exquisite*, that the highest Figures of Speech are not able to express it? For surely, if God *can will* what he pleases, he may *contract* the Punishment of Sin to a less Duration, by *encreasing* in a proportionable manner the Burthen and the Grievance of it; as well as *protract* (as Divine Writ seems to represent it) the Reward of Virtue, to Life everlasting. 'Tis certain then, that if it depends on the *mere Will* of God, he can make our Punishment as transient and temporary, as long or as short, of what kind and what degree soever, as he in his infinite Wisdom shall see fit, or sufficient, for *obtaining the End* he designs thereby; and as he

is perfectly good as well as just, what Comfort may we not take from the Consideration of his Mercy?

GOD indeed, in his Holy Word, has *seemingly* threaten'd an Eternity of Punishment to Sin: But on the foot of *mere Will*, he may *wisely* threaten what Punishment he thinks fitting, even that of eternal Torments, and yet be in *no wise obliged* on that account to execute that Threatning upon Sinners; because he threatens conditionally, not to *punish* if he can avoid it, but purposely to *deter* from Sin; which is an Act not so much of Anger and Vengeance, as of Love, Pity and Compassion. Who knows not, that any Father who threatens his Child, may yet *forgive him* if he sees proper so to do; or, at least, may reasonably *abate* so much of his Anger, and so much of the Punishment, as the particular *Nature* and *Circumstances* of the Offence may require. He may threaten to discard and disinherit him *for ever*; and yet may see Cause afterwards not to do it *utterly*, but only *in part*, or for a *certain time*, till the Sense of his Error works a *Change* in him; and then he may, on the same prudential Reasons, re-admit him to his constant Favour and Acceptance.

AND as this implies no Inconsistency with Divine Wisdom, as little does it with Divine *Justice*: Less than an Eternal Punishment, 'tis certain, GOD could not in his Wisdom threaten to the wilful Commission of Sin; nay, had there been *any thing worse* to threaten,

threaten, that he also *might have threaten'd*; because all his Menaces are for the most part found to be *in vain*, and *utterly insufficient* to put a restraint on Vice. Yet there appears no Reason, on the foot of Justice, which can *oblige* him to inflict an Eternity of Torments on the *greatest* Sinners; because, as I said, there is no doubt but GOD, (allowing him to be *arbitrary* in this Matter) who is of infinite Knowledge and Power, may *so proportion* a Man's Punishment to his Sinfulness and Obstinacy, *as* by the excessive Weight and insupportable Load of it, to make an Hour seem *an Age*, and an Age *Eternity*; and so do that *in one Moment*, which he otherwise might have protracted to an *indefinite Duration*. I dare not say to an *infinite* or *eternal* Duration, because 'tis certainly not within the Province of Almighty Power itself, not even of Him *with whom all things are possible*, in any Sense to contract or curtail Eternity, or an Eternity of *any* thing; for then he might *shorten* his own Existence, or the different Modes of it, and so be able *to destroy himself*: Which is a notion attended with a thousand Absurdities, and may therefore be *denied*, without the least Guilt of Impiety or Presumption.

AND again, as GOD might be thus equally just *in remitting* the Threatning of an endless Punishment, by making it at least *Temporary*, if not of as *short Duration* as the Commission of Sin itself; it will not be de-

nied, but (supposing it *in his power*) it would be *good*, and *kind*, and *merciful* in him so to do: And also, that, as he would *sufficiently shew* his Dislike and Detestation of Sin, by punishing it in an equitable Ratio to its respective Guilt; so neither could any Imputation of Impurity lie upon the *Holiness* of his Nature, for so doing. This, I say, is *allowable* and *consistent* with Reason and Truth, supposing the Denunciations of Scripture against Sin to flow, without any *other* Foundation, from the *mere Will* of Almighty God; and that he may and can punish Sinners in what *positive* manner he shall judge most conducive to a just Retribution.

BESIDES, the Nature of *positive Punishments*, which are the only Punishments that God can be supposed to inflict by an *arbitrary* Will and Power, is such, that 'tis plain to me, and will in the Sequel I doubt not appear so to others, that they can *in no wise* be of Eternal Duration. So that in the end one of the two must be given up, either *positive Punishments*, or the *Torments of Eternity*: And if it should prove, that positive Punishments must be given up; then the future Punishment of Sin does not proceed from the *Will* of God, but from the *Natures and Reasons* of things only; and therefore cannot but be as *Immutable* and *Eternal*, as those *Natures and Reasons* are.

Now, if God can have any End before him in punishing Sin in a *positive* and *arbitrary*

ry manner, (and some proper End an infinitely wise Being must have in all his Actions) it must either be, to *reclaim* the Sinner, or to *destroy* him utterly, or for an *Example* to others, or purely for the sake of taking *Vengeance* on an obstinately disobedient and incorrigible Creature. But choose which you will of these Grounds of Punishment to support the *Thesis*; yet it will follow, that as the Punishment itself cannot possibly be *Eternal*, so neither can God, consistently with his own Divine Properties, *inflict* such a Punishment: that is, he cannot *actually* and *positively* inflict Punishment in a future State, for *any of the Ends* afore-mentioned.

'Tis certain, in the first Place, God cannot punish Men in the Life to come with eternal Torments, only to take *Vengeance* on their Perverseness and Incurability in Sin during this Life; without giving up at the same (which is impossible) the *Perfection* of his moral Attributes. For this would be to have the Spirit of a *Tyrant*, who punishes for punishing sake, and takes a Delight in making and seeing his poor Slaves and Vassals *unhappy* and *miserable*. 'Tis punishing for no End but to please a malicious implacable Mind, void of *all Pity* and *Compassion*, of *all Tendernefs*, *Goodness*, and *Mercy*; which is certainly the Reverse of what Reason and Holy Writ teach us to *think* and *believe* of God, the most perfect and best of Beings. If we would paint an evil Spirit, even the worst of Beings, in his *proper Colours*, it must

must be by the Characters of *Malice*, *Implacability*, and *never-ceasing Vengeance*, exerted to no other Purpose, but for *sportive Fury* and *diabolical Delight*. This therefore is an Opinion so repugnant to Reason and Truth, that it may be said to *undeify* (as far as possible) our *Great Creator*, who is the Author of all Good, and *only* of Good; and even to *transform* him into the Image, and Nature, and Disposition of *the Evil one*, who is black with Mischief, and is represented to us as taking a *most horrid* Pleasure in corrupting, accusing, and tormenting others.

No more can the Punishments of Futurity be eternal, supposing GOD should *will* the Punishment of some sinful Beings for an *Example* to others. But probably GOD never did, nor never can, will such a Punishment, that is, *purely* and *properly* for an Example to others; much less can he do it at all to *Eternity*, which carries in it infinitely more of Absurdity and Contradiction. 'Tis said indeed, that the Cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* are set forth for an *Example*, suffering the *Vengeance of Eternal Fire*: But here *Eternal Fire* does not signify an *endless* but an *exterminating* Vengeance; for it means no more than that those Cities were *utterly destroyed*, for their very great and most heinous Offences against GOD and Man. Now if they suffer'd this Vengeance for their *own Sins*, 'tis plain, they are only an Example to others by *mere Accident*, and not principally in the *Design*

sign of God. They are so indeed by a remote Effect, and in that sense may be said to be set forth as such in the Providence of God, or in the natural Course and Order of things; but God did not *punish* those Sinners for that *End*, but in view or consideration of their *crying Sins*, which were so abominable, as not to be borne upon the Face of the Earth. In like manner, he threw the fallen Angels out of Heaven; and they are a terrible Example to us of the Wrath of God against Sin, and of the dreadful *Consequences* of a proud, stubborn, and rebellious Spirit: But they can in no wise be said to be punish'd for our sakes, no, not for *one Moment* of Time; much less to have their Torments continued *for ever*, for an Example to us only, or to any other weak and imperfect intelligent Beings: For if God had not a Reason for punishing them on their *own Account*, it would be unjust in him to take an Occasion for it on *ours*. Whoever is *justly punish'd*, must himself be *guilty**. Besides, to what end is an Example to Eternity?

* LEST any thing should be hence inferr'd to the Prejudice of *Christ's* Sacrifice for the Sins of Mankind, let it be observed, that tho' 'tis said, *our Iniquities were laid upon him*, and, *he bore our Sins in his own Body*; yet 'tis never said, he was *punished* for our sakes: No, every *Punishment* is exacted in *Justice*; but the *Atonement* which our Lord made for Sin, was on all sides a pure Act of *Mercy*: "*Freely done, and freely accepted, without any Tie of Justice, or any other Obligation whatsoever.*" See *Morality of Rel.* p. 42, &c.

nity? Is it not designed, to deter from Sin, or to drive to Repentance? and will it ever have *this Effect*, or not? If the End be obtain'd, the Example ceases: And if it never be obtain'd, to what Use or Purpose is such an Example?

BUT it will be plainer still, that no *positive* Punishment can be endless or eternal, if it be designed by the *Will* of GOD to *exterminate* and *destroy* the Objects of it. For supposing such a Destruction, or Annihilation, to be immediate, on the Sinner's Departure out of this Life; it can be no *Punishment* strictly speaking, but rather a Reward: For 'tis certainly better not to be, than to be for ever miserable; tho' 'tis better to endure *some* Unhappiness, even *great* Unhappiness, for a *determinate* Time, than to be deprived of Being, and to lose all possible Views or Hopes of future Felicity to *eternal* Ages. And supposing this Destruction to commence not till after a *long Duration* of Misery and Torment; yet on the ceasing of a Man's Existence, 'tis undeniable, that his Punishment must *also* cease; and can therefore in no sort, at least in no strict and proper sense, be said to be an *Eternal* Punishment. But tho' I have, for Argument sake, supposed such a Destruction *possible*; yet I must add, that it is naturally *impossible*, as GOD is good, and just, and holy, (and we must admit of nothing for true, that is incompatible with those Divine Properties) that he should *design* a positive Punishment,

ment, flowing from his *pure* and *all-perfect* Will, in either of the Senses before specified. He cannot, as he is just and holy, destroy a Sinner *at once*; because, as that is properly no Punishment, but what a *grievous Sinner* would himself take for a Blessing and an Happiness compared with eternal Misery: So he would neither *sufficiently* shew his Dislike of Sin thereby, nor his Impartiality in recompensing every Man *according to his Work*; for thus, all would be alike dealt with, however different, unequal, and unlike the Flagitiousness of their Crimes, or the Guilt of their Souls, might be. Nor can he consistently with his perfect Goodness and infinite Mercy, punish him *for a Time* only, for a Day, a Year, an Age, or a thousand Years, and then destroy him *for ever*; because, that would throw us back upon the former Absurdity, of God's punishing Sinners in the other World, merely *for punishing sake*; without any other End before him, than *to satisfy* a Thirst of Malice and Revenge, contrary to the *Eternal Principles* of Truth and Reason.

It remains then, that if God shall hereafter punish Sin, or Sinners, at all in a free-will'd *positive* Manner, it can only be for this End: To *reclaim* the Sinner, and to make him worthy of everlasting Happiness. This has certainly the most reasonable View before it, of all the Instances hitherto produced; and if it shall upon *critical* Examination,

nation, be found to be according to the Will of G O D, no doubt but a good Man may wish, and hope, and *rejoice to find it so*: Nay, no Man could be good, or pious, that should hope or wish the *contrary*, to any rational Being whatsoever; because it would not only be betraying an inhuman Disposition, but actually opposing his *own* corrupt Will to the Holiness and Purity of the *Divine*.

N O W the Reformation of a Sinner, if *at all effected* in a future State by such a supposed *positive* Punishment, must be finished at one time or other; tho' we were to suppose, what is very rationally supposable, that inveterate Habits of Sin, such especially as are *rivited* into the Judgment and Understanding of a Man by *false* and *delusive Reasonings*, as well as into his Constitution and Temper by *long Custom* and *repeated Practice*, neither will, nor can be reformed for many Ages. Such Torments, inflicted on a sinful unbelieving Soul, by the *arbitrary* Power of the supreme Being, would, I question not, soon bring him to *Faith* and *Repentance*, as far as Repentance signifies *Grief* and *Sorrow* for Sin; but how long Time it would take *to purge* and *purify* him from the Hatred of G O D and the Love of Sin, to the true Love of G O D and all Goodness, that is, *to change* his corrupt Will from an evil Habit to a good one, from a *thorough* Inclination to Vice, to the *constant* Practice of Virtue, is perhaps
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impossible to guess at. How many thousands of Years before the Creation of the World, the *Evil Spirits* might have been subjected to the Wrath of G O D, we know not; but this we know, that since the Creation of the World, many thousands of Years have intervened, and yet tho' *they believe and tremble*, they continue the *same* blaspheming, envious, malicious, corruptive Beings they ever were: And as some Men seem *as averse* to all true Piety towards G O D, and Righteousness to their Fellow-Creatures, *as* the Devils themselves can be supposed to be; 'tis certainly not without Reason, that we are taught to believe, that they shall undergo the *same Punishment* (whatever is really meant by it) which was from the Beginning *prepared for the Devil and his Angels*: And yet perhaps it may have no quicker or speedier an Effect *in reclaiming* a perversly wicked, and at present incorrigible *human Soul*, than it has had *in purging away* the Inveteracy and Malice of a *diabolical Spirit*. However, if the Souls of Men are ever to be reclaimed and amended by future *positive* Punishments, tho' it should not be for many Millions of Ages; yet then the Punishment would have *an End*, that is, when it had work'd the supposed Effect G O D design'd it should do; and consequently cannot in the very Nature of Things so considered, be *endless* and *eternal*.

But perhaps, before I conclude this Head it may be worth reflecting, that all positive Punishment is *purely external*, (at least such are those of *Scripture*, if they are to be understood literally) and of course it tends only in itself to restrain the *outward Action* of Vice, of which probably there will be none in a future State. There is appearingly no Connection between *such* a Punishment and the *depraved* Will of an human Soul; and in this Life, we are certain, that the severest *positive* Punishments have neither Efficacy to *convince* the Understanding, nor to *convert* the Will, tho' they are frequently of Use to make Men dissemble both: But in the other World, Diffimulation will be *out of Date*, and *utterly unable* to serve any End in the Presence of the Divine Being, with whom only we shall have then to do, *before whom all Things*, even the most secret Thoughts of every intelligent Creature, *lie naked and open*, and as it were *unbosomed* to his all-piercing Eye.

HERE we complain of every *persecuting* Act of Man, even of every Penalty as well as Punishment, as *unnatural* and *improper*, and altogether *useless*, to the Ends of true Religion, that is, for working or begetting in us a *real Principle* or *Spirit* of Virtue and Goodness, as well as of Christian Faith; which no doubt they are: And shall we put the most *wise, just* and *good* GOD, upon a Method of Reformation and Amendment, which we
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utterly *abhor* and *condemn* ourselves? which we confess is *naturally* insufficient, as well as *absolutely* unwise and abominable to be practised? If such Punishments could be thought to *reform*, or tend to *reform*, the Souls of faithless impure Men in the other World, either by their *long* Continuance or *great* Severity; would not this justify the *cruellest* Acts of Inhumanity for Religion sake in this? Even the Dragoonings of *France*, or the horrid Tortures of a *Spanish* Inquisition, in order to bring Men back from Error to Truth, or from an impious Immorality to Piety and Virtue? Can we do better than *imitate* the Good and Great GOD for *so good an End*? Or can we take a more reasonable or more sure Way, here, to *convince* and to *convert* than he himself, on this Argument, is supposed to do hereafter? Even, than to burn, or some Way or other grievously to torment, those for a *Moment* for their eternal Good; which God will otherwise burn, or grievously torment, *for many Ages*? Either confess that this is the most *certain* and *effectual* Way of convincing and converting *at present*; or maintain, that it is *against* the Nature and Reason of Things, for GOD to make Use of it for that End *in a future State*.

For my part, I cannot but think, this is so repugnant to our natural Notions of the *Wisdom*, the *Goodness*, and *Justice* of GOD, as well as to all the known Principles of *Truth* and

and *Reason*; that it is a Method he never *will* take, perhaps I might say, that he never *can* take, for the reclaiming and reforming the Souls of Men. It bears no natural Proportion to the End, and is therefore *absolutely unfit* for the perfectly Just and All-knowing God, to permit *to us*, or to put in practice *himself*. The Discipline of Force and Power may compel the external Act *to lie still*, or *stand in fear*; but the Mind of Man will be still the same, and the Will continue unchanged, except only *farther provoked* to Opposition, Hatred, and Abhorrence. The Spirit of Love will never be created by it, which is the only *true Temper* and *Disposition* of Duty and Obedience.

NOTWITHSTANDING, this is the Stronghold of the *Anti-eternalists*: And it is from the Idea of these *supposed* positive threatnings and Punishments, so absolutely dependent on the *mere Will* of God, as they seem to be, and really are, if they have any Place in *Nature*, that some Men have raised to themselves Hopes, in view of the *Divine Goodness* and *Mercy*, that the future Punishment of Sin will be *temporary*, and (which is yet but a miserable Consolation to any thinking Sinner) will, at least *after some Ages* of the most exquisite Pain and Torture, have an *End*. But supposing these *pretended* Threatnings should be (strictly speaking) no Threatnings at all, but only *explicit Denunciations*, that is, Declarations of an *eternal* and *necessary*

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ry Truth; and that the future Punishment of Sin doth not, nor can, proceed from the *mere Will* of God, but from the *unchangeable Natures* of things themselves; what a Disappointment will it be to these *imaginary* Reasoners, to find themselves wrong in the Account, and that all their fond Hopes were built on a *sandy* Foundation? And 'tis certain this must be the Case, on a more mature and distinguishing Consideration of it.

HE that reflects, if he does but do it in a truly rational and metaphysical manner, on the *Infinite Goodness* of the Supreme Being, will plainly see, that tho' he can do *All Good* to his Creatures; yet he cannot possibly, *i. e.* consistently with his own *Holy* and *Benign* Nature, bring *Any Evil upon them*, any more than lead them into Sin, nor ever actually or positively of his own Will, *inflict on them any Punishment*. He is Just, when he lets *Things* take their Course, and *Wickedness* be a Punishment to itself; and he is Good, when he graciously prevents the dreadful Effects of *it* and *them*, either in this World, or the other, by some extraordinary Means or interposing Mercy. What we call *Judgments* upon a sinful People, or by which we say ungodly Men are *justly punished*, are really nothing but the necessary Consequences of their Vices, or the natural Effects of second Causes, *not controlled* by the Power of Almighty God. If a Conflagration lays a City in Ashes, it either came by some Accident, or by some malicious

licious Design of *Devil* or *Man*; but never by the Will, or Design, of *God*: Or if a Pestilence depopulates it, this arose from the *Malignancy* of a stagnating or infected Air; but never by the *Appointment* of an infinitely good and gracious Being. His very Nature *contradicts* the Supposition of it. For otherwise what wicked Rebels should we be in opposing or withstanding the *just Judgments* of *God* upon us, by any thing but by Supplication and Prayer? But if we suppose them nothing but the *natural Effects* of second Causes, we then also have a Right in Reason to defend ourselves from them, by the most proper and natural Means we can. And as it is in this World, so it will be in the World to come: *God* has it in his Power to do *what Good* he pleases, consistently with his Holiness and Wisdom; but it is neither in his Will or Power, to wish *any Evil*, or to do it, either to the Souls of Men, or to any other intelligent Creature. And therefore the future Punishment of Sinners will be as I shall shew anon, no other than the *necessary Effects* of Sin, arising from the Truth and Reason of things.

BUT to clear this Argument from all Objection, let it be observed, that this Notion of *God's never inflicting* any Punishment upon his Creatures in any sense whatever, is no Reproach to the Providence of *God*, or to his *just* and *equitable* Government of the World: It is no Reason for our *not dreading* his Displeasure, nor any Ground for *lessening*
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our Hope and Confidence in him, or for *not applying* to him on all Occasions by *Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving*. For he who sees all things, foresees the natural Effects of second Causes, and the pernicious Consequences of Sin; and as it is his *highest* Prerogative and *most essential* Property to *shew Mercy* and to *do Good*, he has it in his Almighty Power and infinite Wisdom, not only to foretell, but to stop the Course of Nature, and to prevent the Malice of Men and Devils, whenever he pleases; and to take off the Dangers and Results of Vice, as he sees we deserve it of him; and in a word, is able to make *all things work together for the Good of them who love him with Sincerity and Truth*: And we therefore, as a Mark of our Obedience and Dependence, ought in every thing to make known our Requests unto GOD; and to bless his Name for all the Good we receive, and the Mischiefs we escape; and especially to beg him to assist us, by his Grace and Favour, in the great Work of our eternal Salvation; that we may have no Share in those dreadful Punishments, we naturally tremble at, but be made happy for ever in the Joys of Heaven.

As the supreme Being is on all Accounts, and in every Idea we have of him, *perfectly Good*; we are certain, he could create no rational Beings without *perfect Goodness*, according to the Class in which he placed them, nor for any other End than to make them

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Happy, nay, *eternally Happy*; which is what every Creature of *that* kind, not only in his Wishes and Desires, but in his Nature and Faculties from which those Desires spring, is capable of: Or else we must say, God has, in the very Constitution of our Nature, made us *a Delusion* to ourselves, or given us Hopes and Fears, Desires and Powers, to no *true* End, or *reasonable* Purpose. Eternal Happiness then was originally designed to be the *natural Consequence* of moral Goodness; and may be truly called, tho' naturally resulting from it, its *final* Reward or Recompence.

AND not only this: But, as God is himself absolutely good, and just, and wise, and holy; he could not but furnish all his rational Creatures with natural Powers, and means *to preserve* themselves pure and good, and also *to obtain* that Happiness for which they were created. That some of them are fallen short of Happiness, and have made themselves miserable by *abusing* their Faculty of Free-will to *enormous* and *irrational* Purposes, is no just reproach to any of the Divine Attributes; tho' we cannot but say, God must have *foreseen*, that they would act in this foolish and perverse manner. In creating them *pure* and *for Happiness*, his Goodness is sufficiently justified; and in allowing them all the *proper Means* and *Powers* of obtaining that End, his most perfect and impartial Justice also. Now this being granted, let it come home to ourselves: And if we all, or any of us, should
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throw ourselves *carelessly* or *obstinately* into a Course of Sin, and consequently into a State of Misery and Undoing, even tho' it should prove *Eternal*; we may indeed *blame* ourselves, and justly *reproach* our own ill-managed Conduct; but we can in no wise *cast* any *just* Opprobrium upon GOD, who in all his Dispensations towards us hath been perfectly *Good* and *Gracious*.

THIS must be said, or otherwise GOD could not justly have ever created any *free* Agents, that is, Creatures with Power to *choose* Right or Wrong, and *to do* Good or Evil, and consequently *to draw upon themselves* Happiness or Misery in Proportion as their Deservings should chance to be; for this Notion is naturally *included* in Agency or Freedom of Will, and all Creatures *so endued* might have acted in the same unreasonable and disobedient Manner: But he has created *many* such Agents, and we know, we Men have all of us *come short of the Glory of GOD*, that is, of acting up to his Glory as we ought to do; and as surely as Sin *reigns* in us, and to the *Degree* it reigns, so sure we may be, that according to the Laws of Nature, which have *inseparably annex'd* Happiness to Virtue, and Misery to Vice, as their *just* and *final* Retribution, the one will continue as long as the other *naturally* and *unavoidably*, that is, for ever, except the Habit of Virtue or Vice be changed.

NOR let it be thought, that this Expression, *for ever*, when spoken of everlasting *Death, Undoing* or *Destruction*, carries any Idea with it (when well considered) of *too rigid* a Severity, or of what we call *Injustice*; for the Punishment will not be *arbitrary*, but *equitable*, according to Mens *just Deserts*, founded on the Nature and Reason of Things, as they *necessarily* exist in the eternal Ideas of the Divine Intellect, and consequently *independently* on the Divine Will; or in other Words, every Wickedness will *necessarily* and *unalterably* have its natural and proper Torment, and in a Degree *proportioned* to its Variety of Kind and Circumstance.

THEY that think it inconsistent with the *Goodness* of GOD, (which yet, it should be remembered, is always so tempered with infinite *Wisdom* and perfect *Justice*, as to complete the Character of an *impartial* Governour and Judge of all the World) to inflict in the natural Course of his Providence, an *Eternal Punishment* for Sin, which is *short* and *temporary*; will hardly say, (if they think at all) that 'tis inconsistent with his *Justice*, to let a Man reap *the Fruit of his own Doings*: For, this we see he does every Day we live; and, in Torments too, *far exceeding* and *much more lasting*, than the Pleasures of Sin. Nay, supposing the Souls of Men to be lively, active and sensible, in the *intermediate State* between the Day of Death

Death and the Day of Judgment, (which is certainly the most common, if not the most rational, *Opinion*) we cannot but say, he *permits* them at least *this Fruit*, the natural Consequences of their Actions, in the other World; and as it is *now* near six thousand Years since the Departure of *some* sinful Souls out of this World, it must be affirmed, they have so long had their Consciences *let loose* upon them in the dreadful and tormenting Reflections of an ill-spent Life.

Now if we consider this Point truly, we shall find, that *to punish* an unhappy Soul, (for no Man will say, but the Remorse and perpetual Stings of Conscience are a *grievous Punishment*; which as it is the natural Result of Things, proceeds *from* GOD in the eternally designed Constitution of them) for a thousand or five thousand Years, is no more consistent with the *perfect* Justice, or the *infinite* Compassion of GOD, than his doing it *to Eternity*: For a thousand Years or more of Punishment *of any Kind*, whether it be supposed natural or positive, for fifty, thirty, or perhaps but one, of Sin; nay, it may be for the Obstinacy of one *heinous* Sin only, unrepented of; (for the Obstinacy of *one Sin* has as much a condemning Guilt, as the Obstinacy of a *thousand*) has equally the Appearance of an *inequitable*, tho' not of so *unequal*, a Proportion. But since the general Notion of Men allows, that GOD may lay the
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the one upon Sinners, that is, upon such as are *already departed*; 'tis undeniably conclusive, on the Strength of the same Notion, against the Advocates of *finite Punishments*, that G O D may justly suffer this *natural* Punishment of Sin, which we are now treating of, to continue *for ever*: And since he has declared in his Holy Word (wherein, no doubt, the Ambiguity of the Phrases is as much *for* as *against* it) that it *shall be so*; it is not contrary to the acknowledg'd Reason and Truth of Things, as not being repugnant to the Justice and Goodness of G O D, to believe it.

T H A T Sin is punish'd *naturally* in its own Consequences, or has Misery and Pain for its *certain* Attendant, every Punction of a Man's Conscience at present verifies; on the serious Consideration of the *Obliquity* of his moral Practice, from the eternal Rules of Virtue and Goodness. And can any one say, 'tis impossible or unlikely, that such a Sense of Guilt should continue *always*, in a Soul *devoid* of all Goodness, and *entirely subjected* to Sin and Impurity? Nay, would not even such a Sense *of any one Sin*, grown habitual to the Soul by Frequency and Repetition, render that Soul *for ever miserable*? Not indeed so much as if it had a thousand, but *in Proportion* to its Degree of Guilt. Now this continual Pain and Remorse of Conscience, especially for Obstinacy in sinning, tho' I say, but in one *single Immorality*, against the
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Light and Conviction of his own Mind, during the Time of a Man's Probation upon Earth, when he *ought* and *might* have secured to himself an eternal Happiness, by a contrary Conduct, that is, by *breaking off* his Sins by Repentance and Amendment, and *constantly endeavouring* to preserve the Love of GOD in his Heart, and the continual Practice of all Virtues in his Life and Conversation (which I call *an Habit of moral Goodness*, and which may certainly be maintain'd even in the midst of the *many* Weaknesses and Infirmities of our corrupt Nature, or else all Religion is an *unreasonable Burden*) is in the Language of Scripture an *everlasting Death*, or a perpetual State of *never-ceasing* Misery; and is consequently that *Worm* which never dies, and that *Fire* which is inextinguishable.

It appears then from this, that the Torments of Sin *hereafter* are properly the Result of a Man's Life, in Proportion as it has been *more or less* sinful; and they are as *certain* a Consequent of it, in the Nature and Reason of Things, as everlasting Happiness is *naturally* of a good one, or so far, I mean, as the Life of a Man has been good. For if moral Virtue *was constituted* by GOD (as has been shewn) to beget an Eternity of Happiness; by what Arguments can a Man maintain, that a Want of moral Virtue, *i. e.* of the *only Thing* that can *naturally* make him happy, shall *not be attended* with an Eternity

nity of Unhappiness? I think I have argued before, that this Doctrine is not incompatible with the *Justice* and *Goodness* of G O D, no more than it seems to be with the *often repeated* Sense of Scripture. In short, they are Opposites in *every thing*, and will *always* continue so; or else, the Natures of Things, and their eternal Relations, must be utterly *confounded*.

Now, if the future Punishment of an obstinate Sinfulness will be *naturally*, and therefore *necessarily*, according as the Works of a Man have been *more* or *less* evil; it will be perceived at once, that there can be no Occasion for *positive* Punishments to be expressly or directly *inflicted* by the immediate Hand of G O D, (supposing the *infinite Goodness* of his Nature would, which I have shewn it will not, admit of it) in *any Sense* or to *any Purpose* whatsoever; except a Man will say, that the Torments of a *wounded Spirit* are not sufficient to make him *enough unhappy*, which are unalterably annexed to the Wilfulness of Sin in the very Nature and Constitution of things, and consequently, all the scriptural Denunciations against Sin, as touching a *future State*, can be no more than Declarations of this *eternal Truth*; urged especially as a Check to Vice, and a Spur to Virtue.

THE Law of Nature is really and properly no part of the *Christian Revelation*, but stands on its *own* eternal and immutable
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Foundations, tho' therein most *purely taught* and *powerfully enforced*; and the natural *Sanctions* of that Law, the Rewards and Punishments of Morality, are in like Manner no proper Part of it, but are only *explicitly declared* to us, and the Verity of them *openly maintain'd* and *asserted*, under the strongest Expressions and Forms of Speech. They are indeed set forth in a *legal judiciary* Manner, under the terrifying Figure of a *Tribunal*, an actual pronouncing of *Judgment*, and the Diversity of Rewards and Punishments, *particularly* and *personally* assigned; but this (as many *other Things* in Scripture are) is only spoken *after the Manner of Men*, to adapt the Matter the better to our Minds and Capacities, by an Allusion to *visible* Things, which are the most *solemn* and *tremendous* to Flesh and Blood. And I question not, it would appear to any one by an easy Consequence, on an *accurate* Examination of the several Texts of Scripture, relating to this Point, that there is really *nothing more* meant by them as to Punishment, than that the different Punishments of Eternity will be *certainly* and *infallibly* what the Dictates of every Man's Conscience teach they are: *viz.* The *Fruit* of his own Doings, growing naturally out of their *different* Kinds, their *more* or *less* Turpitude, and *heighten'd* or *mitigated* by the Variety of Circumstances attending on them.

SOME indeed, against all this *rational* and *scriptural* Evidence, have fond and foolish Hopes, of *escaping* the just Judgment of God, even his Judgment *so clearly* and *reasonably* explain'd. For they imagine, that as we see in this World, Mens Appetites and Inclinations frequently *change* and *vary*, and they seemingly put off one sinful Habit, and put on another, with a kind of *Indifference*, and without giving themselves any *Pain* or *Trouble* in so doing; so, in likemanner, their vicious Habits may all go off *at once* from the Soul, on its separation from the Body, and leave them either in an eternal State of *Insensibility* to Good or Evil, or in a more desirable one of *Everlasting Happiness*. But probably this is, for want of considering truly, what the *Nature* of a sinful Habit is, and in what *Part* or *Faculty* of the Soul it has its Residence. If a Man has, by the Principles and Motives of Religion, entirely changed his Desires of all Sin, to an absolute Detestation of it, and to the Love of all Good; he may be truly said to be *habitually* good and virtuous: But a Man may be convinced in his Understanding of the *Enormity* and *Unreasonableness* of Sin, and of the Worth of Virtue, and yet continue to be a *very grievous* Sinner; for all that are learned in the *Theory* of Religion, are by no means Adepts in the *Practice* of it. Besides we often find, that Habits are not always changed, even by *neglecting* or *leaving off* the Practice of this or that

that Vice, Many, 'tis observable, who *seem* to have changed their Vices, yet tell over their former Pranks *with Pleasure*, and even in their maturer Age *make a jest* of those Follies of Youth, which they would then think *mean, base, or unmanly*, to be guilty off. But is this any Proof that the Man *is changed*, or his evil Habit *conquered*? Not in the least: But that he is *the same* wicked and foolish Man he ever was, and his Habit also in its *full* Strength and Vigor; only he wants *Ability*, or *Opportunity*, or may be his *Interest* is against it, on some account or other. For an Habit of Vice is no more in the external *Action*, than it was before in the *Understanding*, nor yet in the *Instrument* of Action, the Hand, Tongue or Eye; but in the *Will* of him that commits it, *with* his Understanding, and by this or that Instrument. And therefore, when the Action *ceases*, and we'll suppose his Understanding *condemns* it; yet if the Will, the Inclination, or the Delight the Man took in that Action *continues*, the Habit of Vice is *unchanged*, and he as *impure*, as *unjust*, or as *profane*, as ever, tho' ever so many Years may have intervened since the Facts were done. And among Sinners, I doubt this Instance is *no Rarity*, even under the Covert of Experience, Wisdom, and Grey Hairs.

Now if this be so, (and who can deny so plain a Truth?) the Consequence then is, that Habits of Vice are *so rooted* in the Will

of an human Soul, by frequent Repetitions of Sin, that they become as it were a part of its *Constitution* and *Nature*; which is the Thing that renders a true Repentance, and the Praxis of Religion, so *very difficult*, and generally *impossible*, to the sensual and worldly-minded: And consequently, except those Habits be reformed and wholly alter'd in this Life, by a firm *Resolution*, unwearied Circumspection, and a gradual persevering *Advance* in the Love of God and all Goodness; they will, they cannot but, go with it into the other, and be always at Hand to *torment* and *plague* it, with the most uneasy and terrifying Reflections. As 'tis truly said of the Good and Righteous, *the Kingdom of Heaven is within you*; so it may be antithetically said of the Wicked, they *carry their Hell* about with them: And were they therefore in the presence of God, in the midst of the *Holy Angels*, and of the *Spirits of just Men made perfect*, their Condition would not be alter'd nor amended: For, the perpetual Guilt of their *own Minds* will render every Place a Terror and a Torment.

At present there are many Amusements, such as frequent *Company* and *Conversation*, the various *Delights* of Sense, and the *Necessities* of Life; sometimes *Reading* and *Study*, and other *Employments* and *Diversions* of a thousand kinds, as a Man's Station and Condition in this World are, which keep the Reflection of his Sins, and the Guilt of his Mind,

Mind, out of View; but when his Soul shall come to be *uncloath'd* of Flesh and Blood, to have no Veil left *to obstruct* his Memory, or *to becloud* his Understanding, and to have no Objects of Sense *to converse* with, nor any thing to do but to consider God and *himself*, the Perfection of *his Nature*, and the Sinfulness of his *own*, the Rectitude of *his Laws* and his *own* manifold wilful and presumptuous Deviations from them, by which he hath *lost* infinite Happiness, and *entailed* endless Misery upon himself; he will be forced then *to look* into his own Breast to some purpose, *to feel* the irresistible Rebukes of Conscience, and *to confess* and *acknowledge* that Truth and Reason of things, which he had before *carelessly* neglected or *obstinately* opposed. Hence will arise, not indeed (as some think) any *blasphemous* Thoughts or Expressions against the Great God of Heaven and Earth, the *impartial Judge* of Men and Angels; (for in the Divine Presence *every Mouth will be stopped*, and God *justified*, even by the most Wicked, *in all his Doings*) but perpetual Shame, Vexation, Confusion, Detestation of a Man's self, and many other such like *tormenting* Passions, more easy to be guess'd at than well described.

THIS, let it be remembred, is nothing but the *natural* and *genuine Fruit* of his own Actions, the *just* and *necessary Wages* of Sin, or the *eternal* and *unchangeable Relation* that there is between Evil and Pain, or between
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Vice and Misery ; which answer as *much*, as *directly*, and as *certainly*, one to another, as any of our Senses to the Objects of them. The *stronger* indeed these Habits are, and the *worser* sort they are of, and the *more* they are adapted to the impure and malicious Disposition of the *Evil one*, the Agonies and Pains of Mind will be, and cannot in the Nature of things avoid being, more *intense* and *great*, more *grievous* and *tormenting* ; but the Duration of all future Punishment will be the *same*, that is, the pungent Reflection of *one Sin* will be as continual and as lasting, as that of a *thousand* ; and the Mind will be always vex'd, ashamed, confounded, and abhor itself, before the Most Holy, Gracious and Good GOD, for the sake of *that one*, (the Gospel *right Hand* or *Eye*, that ought to have been *cut off* or *pluck'd out*, but was not) as certainly and unalterably, as if it had been infinitely *more guilty* than we now suppose it.

NOR needs there be *any worse* Punishment than this to be inflicted on a rational immortal Creature, arising merely, by the *eternal Decree* of GOD, from its own *wilfully* polluted State and Condition ; which, being *repugnant* to all Goodness, Truth and Virtue, and *unlike* to that most Pure, Wise, Just, and Best of Beings, on whose Approbation and Acceptance, *determined* and *govern'd* by the natural Fitness and Reason of things, the Felicity of all intelligent Creatures depends, cannot

not but fill his *immortal Soul* with the utmost Horror and most inexpressible Anguish: When it shall see itself, as I said, *past* the Relish of all sensual Pleasures, throughly *unfit* for those that are spiritual, *detested* by all good Beings, and *reproached* by its own Conscience for its inconsiderate Rashness and perverse Folly; and this too, without any *possible* Hopes of ever being in a *better* or *more acceptable* Condition.

How these Thoughts will *then* affect such an unhappy Spirit, any one that *has felt* (as I doubt not, but most Men have in some Degree or other) the Stings of his Conscience on the *first Essays* of a wicked Life, before Custom and Repetition in sinning have *seared* and *harden'd* it in Iniquity; or, that *has ever seen* a miserable Wretch under the Consternations and Agonies of *Despair*, confessing his Torments so great and so insupportable, that Hell itself could not possibly add any thing more *grievous* and *afflictive* than what he *then felt*, under the apparent Displeasure of GOD, for his having so *frequently* and so *obstinately* transgress'd his sacred Laws, and *wilfully* gone against the natural Dictates of Truth and Reason; any one, I say, that has either felt this in himself, or seen any thing like it in another, cannot but be sensible, even by this *faint* and *imperfect* Glimmering, or *remote* Resemblance of Things, how dreadfully tormenting and intolerable *the Pains* of Eternity

nity will be; even without supposing the positive external Punishments of the Gnawings of *Worms*, and the Scorchings of *Fire*, and such like; which, as they are certainly *in-compatible* with the spiritual Nature of an human Soul, can be no other than lofty *Figures* of Speech, representing by sensible things the *Greatness* of those Torments, which it must, if sinful, for ever bear in a future State.

OUR Bodies indeed will be *raised again*: But let us consider the Nature of those Bodies, and the Reason of their Resuscitation. 'Tis most probable, they are raised only for *this End*, That our Souls may receive their proper Recompence for what *they have done in the Flesh*, whether it be good or whether it be evil; for it is the *Soul* only, even *in the Body*, that is capable of Joy or Grief, of Pleasure or Pain, of Happiness or Misery; and perhaps, if the Soul could be at all affected *without* the Body, the Resurrection would not be *so necessary* for the Reward or Punishment of Men, as it is now represented. But then let it be remembred, that as *Flesh and Blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor Corruption Incorruption*, our Bodies shall be quite *changed* from what they are now, and instead of *natural* will become *spiritual Bodies*; much purer may be, and much lighter too, than the finest *Air*, or even *Æther* itself, now is; for we shall be, *as the Angels of God in Heaven*: And consequently such gross material

material Things as *Fire and Brimstone* will have no Power over them, nor be able to affect them *in any sort or degree* soever. And this to me is sufficiently confirmed, in that the *Punishments* of the Wicked will be, as we are reasonably taught to believe, of the *same Kind, Extent and Duration*, as that of infernal Spirits; except we must say, that *they also* are capable of *bodily* Torments, which is a Position (I think) unsupported both by *Reason* and *Scripture*.

IT may then be concluded, that as in *them*, so it will be in *us*, the incorrigible *Habit of Vice* will give the *Eternity of Pain*: And tho' 'tis certain there will be a vast Difference in the Degrees of this kind of Punishment, according as the *Number and Heinousness* of Mens Sins have been more or less; yet 'tis but a poor Comfort to think, that one's Pain or Misery shall *be less* than another's; when notwithstanding that, it will never have *an End*. In this World we have many Pains, Grievings and Afflictions, which we may, and often do, rub through with a *tolerable* Shew (indeed with more of *Shew* than *Reality*) of Ease; because we know, the greatest Duration here is *but a Span long*: And besides, in that short space of Time we have many Flittings, Removes, and Variations of Condition, which make us bear our Troubles with less *Complaint and Regret*, than otherwise we should do: But if *any one Affliction*, whether of Grief or Pain, were to continue up-

on us *incessantly*, without any Change, *for ever*, in which the Mind could see no Hope or Possibility of a Relaxation; I'm perswaded, we should prefer an utter *Destruction*, or *Annihilation*, (which yet I have shewn is *impossible*, from the Attributes of God; and perhaps, if we consider that 'tis generally held, no one particle of *Matter* has ever yet been *destroy'd* nor probably ever *will be*, there is nothing in the Nature of things that we should believe it of *spiritual Substances*) to such a State as this, and say of ourselves, as it was once said of a most unhappy Wretch, *It would have been good for us, had we not been born*. If such a State might be truly called an *Hell upon Earth*; certainly, when the Pain of a Man's Mind shall come to be unalterable, and *for ever* permanent, tho' in as *low a Degree* as the Obstinacy of Sin will allow us to suppose it, it can be nothing less than *everlasting Death*; which is properly an Eternity of *Misery*, as opposed to the endless *Joys and Happiness* of Heaven.

THIS I take to be the truly Rational and Scriptural *Doctrine of Hell-Torments*: But as I have argued *this*, and the *Eternity of them*, chiefly (hitherto) from the Nature and Reason of things, and I know the Charity and tender Disposition of *some good Christians* is such, as they cannot but *wish well* to the Souls of all Men, and even *hope* that the worst of intelligent Beings may, by the infinite Mercy of God, *be saved*, or *restor'd* to eternal

nal Happiness; I shall now try to support the *Truth* of this Doctrine before insisted on, by some unanswerable Reasons and Arguments, taken both from *natural* and *revealed* Religion: The *one* of which, I think, no *rational* Reasoner can give up; and the *other*, I'm sure, no *sincere* and *good* Christian ever will.

NATURAL Religion consists in the Belief of *One* GOD, and of the *Certainty* of a future State of equitable Retribution for our Actions in this Life: *Revealed*, in the Belief of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, as a *Mediator* between GOD and us, and of our being *accepted* to Salvation and Eternal Life by his *alone* Merits, after our best Endeavours to be constantly Good and Virtuous: But this Faith, in *both* kinds, a supposed Non-eternity of Hell-torments entirely subverts and destroys.

THE Knowledge of GOD we most easily learn by the Things that are made, *even his eternal Power and Godhead*; and that of a future State, by the *Consciousness* of our own Minds, and the *Accountableness* of our Rational Nature. And thus, by considering the supreme Government and moral Perfections of GOD, and our own Freedom of Will, and Proneness to *Sin* and *Error*; we grow sensible, that we are here, in this World, placed by his Divine Providence, as in a State of *Trial* of our Conduct and Behaviour, in order to be *recompens'd* hereafter, in the World or State to come, according to the Morality or Immorality of our respective Actions.

Whether we are consider'd as *perfect* or *imperfect*, alters not the Case; our *Probation* is still the same. Before our Fall, we were *naturally* and *necessarily* obliged to continue *perfectly Good*; and now we are fallen, as *Good as we can*. At present, or in our *degenerate* Condition, the Reason of Things requires no more; because 'tis all we are *capable* of. This, I say, is the common Dictate of every Man's Mind; tho' may be he is not perfect Master of the *Reasons*, which might induce God so to have placed him.

Who can say, whether Man had *pre-existed* in a former State, and *miscarried* in his Duty there, with some pitiable Circumstances, which might move the *Mercy* of God to give him the Favour and Opportunity of a *second Trial*, which is not altogether unlikely; for the Spirits of Men, supposing they *did pre-exist*, might be concern'd in the great Revolt of Heaven, which the Arch-Fiend *stirred up* there, against the *Only-begotten* of God; but being drawn into it ignorantly, unwarily, or inconsiderately, (as is the Case with many in all *tumultuous* and *rebellious* Proceedings) God had Compassion on them, as is very *consistent* with the Reason of Things, and with the All-perfect Justice and Goodness of the Supreme Being, (tho' it would not have been so, had they acted *wilfully*; because shewing Mercy would then have been giving Countenance and Encouragement to *enormous* and *immoral* Practices, which cannot be supposed

posed of the most *perfectly Moral Being*, whose Will is an *unalterable* Obligation upon all his rational Creatures to Righteousness and Virtue) and therefore put them into *another State*, wherein, by a contrary Conduct of *greater* Circumspection and *better* Obedience, they might recover their *former Station* in the Glories and the Joys of Heaven; which Opinion, perhaps, may not appear without some *rational* Foundation, if it be considered, that the irreclaimably disobedient *among Men*, shall have their future Portion *with the Devil and his Angels?*

OR, whether G O D immediately on the Creation of the Soul of Man, *invested* it with Flesh and Blood, and *encompassed* it with that multitude of Temptations we daily and hourly meet with, in ten thousand various Shapes and Kinds, *to try* its Fidelity and Constancy in his Service, before he could, in the Truth and Nature of things, reward it with eternal Happiness, the *Immortality* we were at first made for; which is, as far as we seem able to judge with any Certainty, (considering the *free Agency* of an human Soul, and its *natural Power* of being either good or bad, by its own voluntary Election or Choice) the *real* and most *undoubted* State of the Case before us; yet this present State of ours must be allowed by every Man that *impartially* reflects on the Rationality of his Nature, to be designed by G O D, as it appears to be in itself, *for the Trial* of our Faith and Virtue; that
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as we approve ourselves well or ill in those Particulars, we may *receive* from the just Governour of Heaven and Earth a *suitable* and *proper* Retribution.

Now if this World be the State of our *Probation*, as every one sees, and feels, and cannot but confess; and the other that of *Re-compense* for our Work's sake, as is not to be denied, even by those that would put upon it the most *easy* and *favourable* Construction; then this only is the Time of *Grace* and *Favour* allowed by Almighty GOD, in which we may *pray* to him for Help and Assistance, to enable us to *struggle* thro' the many Temptations of this Life, and to *do* our Duties faithfully; and in which we may *form* to ourselves reasonable Hopes of obtaining his future Acceptance, by being morally Good here, and to the Degree we are so *: But if *this only* be the State in which GOD *will* (perhaps I might say from the Nature of the Thing itself, *can*) shew us his Favours, or treat us with Long-suffering and Pity, with Mercy and Forbearance, and continual Desires of our *not perishing*; the other, 'tis plain, can

* If we be not good *here*, we shall neither be good, happy, nor knowing *hereafter*: The main Opportunity for Knowledge and Happiness is *after this Life*, but the only Opportunity for being Good is *now*. And if we take care to improve this, we are *sufficiently secure* of the other, and of whatever else appertains to the Perfection of our Nature; but if this be neglected, *all is lost*. See Mr Norris's *Reflections on Human Life*, p. 128.

admit of no *farther* Trial, nor of *any* Alteration in the State of a Sinner, no more than of the Righteous. A good Man will be *naturally* and *unchangeable* for ever happy, in Proportion to his moral Goodness: This our common Notions of *natural Religion*, concerning a just impartial GOD, and a future State, teach us. But then, must not the *same* Person, if he be *naturally* no farther happy than good, be *so far* for ever miserable as vicious? This is a Truth to me as plain as the other. So that if a Person be *more vicious* than good, he will be *more miserable* than happy; and if *extremely vicious*, he will be *extremely miserable*: But as no Man (probably) is utterly devoid of *all Goodness*, tho' in *most* Things some *may be* so, that which is good in him will *always* have its Reward of pleasing Reflections; and consequently that which is bad in him will *always* have its respective Torments.

THEY that think GOD is too good or too just to punish *to Eternity*, or even to permit the natural and unavoidable Effects of Vice, as of Virtue, to continue *for ever*; and that he will consequently so order it, that the sinful Habits of human Souls shall in time *wear off* in the other World by the Greatness of their Pains, and they in the End become *for ever happy*; would do well to reflect, that it is an unreasonable Persuasion to believe, that GOD *will be*, or is *obliged to be*, always *contending with Man*, that is, in
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the other World as this: For as Man is a rational Creature, his Happiness must depend on his *own free* Choice of Things in his State of *Tryal*; and not afterwards, on the *compulsive* Hand of GOD. GOD's eternal and immutable *Decree* is, that Virtue shall make Men for ever *blest*: Vice is a Want of Virtue, just as a Shadow is a Want of Light; and if Men will choose *Darkness rather than Light*, the Consequence is their own. Hence they become for ever *miserable*: Not from the Will of GOD, but from the Nature of Things.

Perhaps you'll tell me, 'Tis not in the Power of Man *to avoid* sinning. I grant it. We are now naturally corrupt and depraved, and fall daily into one Sin or other. To this the Infirmary or Imperfection of our Nature prompts us, and we are indeed not *altogether able* to avoid it. But I put a vast Difference between being *prone to Sin*, and being *wickedly sinful*. The one is *involuntary*, the other *perverse*: the one *pitiable*, the other *punishable*. It is not falling into Sin accidentally or inadvertently, by Surprise or Ignorance, that *wounds* the Conscience for ever; but that which *forms* the Habit of Vice, and *stamps* the Brand of Guilt, and *draws* eternal Misery and Undoing upon the Soul of Man, is, *running* into Sin wilfully and greedily, and *continuing* in its Practice with Obstinacy and Impenitence. To avoid this, is certainly in a Man's *own Power*, and depends absolutely on his *own Will*; and therefore, if he
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suffers for it to Eternity, 'tis but the Result of his *own Choice*: The very Choice itself *condemns* his unhappy Soul, and *justifies* GOD in having eternally annex'd (not *positively*, but *in the Nature* of Things) these Punishments to Vice, and Rewards to Virtue.

THE Sum of the Argument then is this: Our natural Notions of Religion are, that we are accountable Creatures, and this World our *State of Trial*; that the next is our *State of final Recompense*, wherein Happiness will be the certain and inevitable *Reward* of Virtue, and Misery the certain and inevitable *Punishment* of Sin. Now after this to imagine, that GOD either *will*, or *can*, ever take off or remit a Punishment that *necessarily* follows, by his eternal and unalterable Purpose (as Reward does Virtue) a *perverse* Impenitence in Sin, or a *willfully continued* Conduct in immoral Practices; is not only to build without any Foundation, but it is to confound the *two States* so absolutely (as before) distinguished by Nature and Reason, and to suppose that which is designed for our *Recompense* to be also for our *Probation*; as if GOD had no other End of creating us, but that of *trying* us for ever. And to hope he will do this out of his infinite Pity and Compassion to the Works of his own Hands, however *obstinate* and *refractory* they may have been, is to make GOD a Contradiction to himself, and to set his Mercy *at variance* with his Truth and Justice. In this World,

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GOD is certainly wise, and good, and holy, *in letting* Men reap the Fruit of their own Actions; this every Day's Experience fully proves: And we are sure, he can do it no more in *one* Instance than in *many*, no more in the *least* than in the *greatest*, no more for a *Time* than for *Eternity*, if it be at all, or in any respect, inconsistent with the Perfection of his moral Attributes so to do.

AGAIN, as the Hypothesis of the Non-Eternity of Hell-Torments overturns our well-established *Notions* of natural Religion; so it also renders ineffectual its whole Design on our religious and moral *Practice*. As the Distinctions of Good and Evil, and of Virtue and Vice, and *from* and *to* Eternity; if their Rewards and Punishments were not as *fixt* and *immutable* as the Things themselves, we should never know what to expect from GOD, nor how to conduct ourselves with any Certainty, respecting the *Morality* of our Lives and Conversations; but be perpetually fluctuating between Hopes and Fears, of what *might*, or *might not*, happen. For if a wicked Man, a Man who continues incorrigibly *to pursue* his Vices and Pleasures, may entertain Hopes of being in the End *for ever* in a State of Joy and Felicity, tho' after some Duration of *exquisite* and *inexpressible* Misery; and this according to natural and eternal Truth, founded on GOD's *Goodness*, his *Justice*, or any *other* divine Property; this leaves *the Wages of Sin* in such Un-
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certainty, as to their *Duration* at least, that a Sinner will give himself a much *greater Loose* here, in hope of being soon reclaimed in the other World, when he shall come to be *better convinced* by Sight and Experience of what he now only knows by Faith, or perhaps renders almost incredible to himself, by raising *Doubts*, and *Suspensions*, and *false Arguings* (which the Love of Sin will always suggest to him) about it. Nay, if the Punishment of Sin would *ever have an End*, it then, being in its own Nature *finite*, falls naturally and of course under the arbitrary Will of GOD, to be made *as long* or *short* as he pleases; and if it be just in GOD *not to permit* an eternal Punishment for a temporary Sin, it would be certainly *very good* in GOD, and even *most merciful*, to contract it into the shortest possible; which by his Almighty Power and infinite Wisdom, we must suppose him *capable of doing*, in a just and equitable Manner.

Now under such a Consideration as this, (if there was any Validity in the Argument) what Sinner living, enslaved by an evil Habit of Immorality, would give himself the *present Uneasiness* of Self-denial, to avoid it? Do not Men daily choose their Revellings and Debaucheries *at all hazards*, even tho' they see just before their Faces the most racking Pains and Agonies of the *most loathsome* and *tormenting* Diseases? And would they then ever reform their Lives by the *feint Terror* of

a future remote Punishment, which they imagine, from *this false Notion* of the Goodness of God, will be *as short or shorter*, tho' much *more exquisite* and *tormenting* than the other. This seemingly gives such a Rein to Libertinism and Immorality, that they cannot but run away with Men without Curb or Restraint: And I question not, but every Man that thinks in *that* way, would he speak his Sentiments *freely* and *without reserve*, could not but own himself *less affected* with the Purity of Virtue, and the Turpitude of Vice, as well as with the Reward of the one, and the Punishment of the other, than *if he believed* their respective Retributions would be absolutely and equally eternal.

AND this *ill Consequence*, the Favourers of this Opinion are so well aware of, that not only some *modern* Writers, but others also among the *Ancients*, who have treated upon this Argument, have left it as a *necessary* Caution, that the Notion of the *Non-eternity* of Hell-torments ought not, however, to be propagated among the *ignorant* and *unthinking* Vulgar, but the old Opinion be still taught *to them*; that they may be the better and more effectually *deterred* from running headlong into Vice and the Practice of Sin. How I blush for the Weakness of these *prudential* Reasoners, and for the utter Insufficiency of *such* an Argument! If it tends *to encourage* Iniquity in Practice, does not this loudly declare it *to be false* in Principle? For nothing
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can be true in Religion, that is an Enemy to Virtue; because the whole Design of Religion is, to make Men good.

MOREOVER, what religious Truth is there, that is not of *general Use*, and as much the Concern and Interest of *every one* to know, as of *any one*? Is not Truth the Property of *all*, that can arrive at it? And was there ever a Time, or ever can be, when a *real* Doctrine of Religion ought to be *conceal'd* from the Minds of Men, lest it should vitiate and corrupt them? Infants indeed are not fit for *strong Meat*; but *poisonous Food* is equally pernicious to the Adult, as to Children: And probably it will be found, that such a Doctrine as this, is of *equal Danger* in the Hands of the Knowing as the Ignorant. For have not all Men *naturally* the same eager Appetites and unruly Passions, and are they not *equally* fond of indulging them, when the Restraints are taken off? Not to say, that it is not always that the *most famed* for Learning, are therefore Men of the *greatest* Taciturnity; but 'tis commonly seen, when they are grown Masters of any particular Doctrine, they are either *charitably* or *ambitiously* inclined to shew their superior Knowledge, and to propagate what they know in Religion, even amongst all Men of *every rank*, let the Consequence be what it will. If then this Doctrine should be concealed from *some*, it ought in like manner to be concealed from *all*; and this Necessity of Concealment shews both
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the Falshood and Iniquity of it: For, Truth cometh to the Light, that it may be made manifest; but Error skulks and hides itself, lest it should be reprov'd.

ON the other Hand, If the future Punishment of Sin be fixed, as unbiass'd Reason dictates, on an *eternal Foundation*, necessary and immutable; there is then left no Hope for any Sinner, whether *great or little*, whether guilty of *many grievous*, or but a *few slighter* Sins, but in an immediate and total Reformation of *all* his vicious Habits and unrighteous Customs, of whatever kind or degree they be. This Doctrine explains to him at once the *indispensible Necessity* of that, and throws him also with Humility into the Arms of GOD, to find out for him, in his infinite Wisdom and boundless Mercy, some *other and more gracious* Means of Salvation, than such silly ill-grounded Views, as of his *enduring* a Course of inexpressible Torments in a future State, only to bring him, an *obstinate Wretch*, to himself, and to his right Mind, whether he will or no; and, by that *irrational and compulsive* Means, to the eternal Acceptance of the Divine Being: In which, as there is *no Sense*, so there can be in it neither *Truth nor Reason*.

HAVING so far established and supported this Doctrine, by some rational Considerations drawn from our Notions of *natural Religion*; I shall now pursue the same Truth, by taking a short View of *revealed*. And to me it immediately

immediately appears, that it was on the Account of *eternal Death*, or of an endless State of Unhappiness and Misery hereafter, being *naturally* due to Sin, and, that it could be on no other, that *the Loving-kindness of GOD towards Man appeared*: It was because the *certain* and *unalterable* Punishment of wilful, perverse, and incorrigible Sinners is, and cannot but be, as the Scripture, represents it, *Everlasting*; that GOD in his great Mercy took Pity on *such Sinners* as he saw striving after moral Perfection, amidst their many Infirmities, and were in nothing *wilfully*, or at least *not perversely*, evil, to re-instate them in his Divine Acceptance, according to the *Reason of things*, (for why should any one, labouring against Destruction, be adjudged *to perish*? Can a Man do more than is in his *power* to do?) and by their continual going-on in well doing, to bring them to Salvation in *Jesus Christ*. In this, all the moral Attributes of GOD were *plainly concerned*; no less his Wisdom, his Justice, and his Holiness, than his Mercy. But it would have been a Contradiction to *all these Properties* in the Divine Nature, had he purposed to do as much for such Men as are *presumptuously*, and continue *obstinately*, wicked; who *contemn* his Precepts, and *despise* his Authority, and by that means set his Vengeance at defiance, and put no Value on his eternal Approbation, and the unspeakable Joys of Heaven. To restore *such* would have been to destroy the natural Distinctions

inctions of Good and Evil, and contrary to their Immutability to have set Vice on a level with Virtue. And therefore, tho' *this Salvation*, like *immortal Life* at the first, was design'd *for all Men*; yet the Scriptures every where set it forth, that none shall obtain it, but those that *sincerely desire* and *endeavour* to be good.

As good Men then *were*, and *are*, and ever *will be*, Objects of the Mercy of GOD, such as he cannot but have Pity on, and will one day bring to everlasting Happiness; so *this Mercy* might be offered to us (for all Mercy is a mere *Grace* and *Favour*) on what Consideration he thought proper, so it were consistent with his Wisdom, his Justice, and his Holiness, to bestow it; and the more proper it would be, as it more largely express'd his Love, and Tenderneſs, and *Good-will to Men*. This he has graciously declared, is, his *only-begotten Son* dying for us, whom he sent into the World *for that End*; even to be a *Propitiation* (and the Almighty may *in Mercy* appoint and accept what Propitiation he pleases) for those that shall lay hold of it by a *true Faith*, and make that Faith a Means or Motive of *sincere Obedience*. By this, he has shewn his *Wisdom*, in providing still for the good Government of Mankind, in having Mercy only thro' *Christ* on the *sincerely* good; and letting the *wilfully* wicked, notwithstanding, to reap the Fruit of their own Ways: His *Justice*, even in shewing of Mercy,

Mercy, to such as *endeavour* to deserve it; and in permitting those that *do not*, to bear their own Punishment for ever: And his *Holiness*, in thus expressing, by the most powerful and perswasive Instance, (*viz.* his *giving up his Son for us all*) the unchangeable *Love* and *Approbation* he has for moral Virtue, and his irreconcilable *Detestation* of Iniquity and Sin.

BUT now, if we should suppose (as some do) the Torments of Hell *not to be* Eternal; what need was there for *such a Scheme* as this, to bring any one Soul of Man to the immortal Joys of Heaven? For, all, one time or other, *must be saved* of course. Every Man will, by the *Law of Nature*, which is the Reason of things, be for ever Happy so far as he is *Good*; but as no Man is *completely* Good, or without *every wilful* Immorality about him in every kind or degree soever, no Man can by the *same Law* be for ever *perfectly* Happy, and consequently must be in some sort *eternally* Unhappy, which, I have shewn before is *everlasting Death*: Hence comes in the *Necessity* of a Saviour, to free even good Men by *his Merits*, from this natural Consequence of Sin; which could not but take place *upon all*, were it not for the Mercy of GOD so *graciously* vouchsafed unto us. The Notion therefore, that the Punishments of Sin in a future State will in time have an End by any *arbitrary* or *natural* Means, seems to me inconsistent with the Belief of our *Redemption* by the Blessed Je-

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ful, and destructive of the grand Doctrines of the Christian Religion; and therefore ought in no wise to be come into by *any one Person*, that would be thought to be a *Christian indeed*.

FOR, consider, if eternal Happiness may be gained by *another* Method, nay, cannot but be so, (as is pretended) from the Consideration of the moral Perfections of GOD, even of his *Goodness*, and *Justice*, and *Mercy*; and this, according to Truth and Reason: How can our Lord be said, *to have brought Life and Immortality to light* by the Gospel? Is it any where *declared* therein, that he only came to let us into the Knowledge of this *pretended Truth*, viz. That hereafter the Immorality of Vice, and the Depravity of our Nature, shall be *purged away* by inutterable Woe and Torment, and we in that forcible manner *restored* to the Salvation of GOD? Is this the Way by which *all Men shall be saved*, that is, all that will? For 'tis irrational to save a Free Agent, whether he will or no: And I question much, whether GOD himself can do it; considering the Nature of things, and his own Divine Properties. No: Is it not every where declared, this only can be effected, thro' *Christ*, by their own *voluntary* and *constant* Pursuit of moral Goodness and Virtue, and their persevering to the End in a *permanent* Habit thereof? And also, that they who *know not* GOD, and *obey not* the Law of Truth and Righteousness, shall undergo *an everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord* by the
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the Divine *Vengeance*; that is, by an *Act* of the most perfect Justice: Which I take to be, his suffering or permitting every Sinner to *reap the Fruit* of his Doings even to Eternity; which is a Truth I have all along shewn, to be founded on the necessary and immutable Relations of things themselves.

WERE the Everlastingness of Hell-Torments then, in a strict and proper Sense, an *untrue* or *unreasonable* Doctrine, it would directly follow, that *all the Doctrines* of Christianity must be given up, and indeed *all Revelation* whatsoever; which seems chiefly designed for conveying down to us *Christians* (whom GOD has thought fit to *favour* beyond many other People) the more perfect Knowledge of the *Redemption* of Mankind, that we particularly may be thereby carried to *higher Degrees* both of Virtue and Glory. And if *Revelation* be given up, and with it the Truth of our Redemption by a *Mediator*, then all our Hopes standing on the Foundation of the *mere Law of Nature*, every Soul of us (as has been often said) must perish *for ever*; because as we all are *Sinners*, we must all be *miserable*, in the Nature of things, to the degree we have been so.

BUT, what! may it be objected, shall *Hell* for ever exist, and *Opposition* never cease? Shall GOD never be able to *subdue* his Adversary? Shall Evil always *prevail*, and Sin *domineer* it eternally over human Souls? Did not GOD create all Men *for Happiness*; and shall his Design be frustrated, and the End

he set before him *never* be obtained? What then mean those Expressions in Scripture: That *thro' Death* Christ *might destroy him that had the Power of Death, that is, the Devil?* That *the Son of God* was manifested in the *Flesh*, to destroy the Works of the Devil? And, *the last Enemy that shall be destroyed is Death?* And, *Christ must reign, till he hath put all Enemies under his Feet?* Is not here an absolute Conquest promised, and a final Destruction foretold of Sin, Death and the Devil; and consequently, a thorough Restoration of all Mankind to Joy and Happiness, *when the End cometh?*

I answer: No doubt, *God is able* to subdue all his Enemies; and, that Sin, Death and the Devil will one Day be destroy'd, *in the Scripture Sense.* There is no disputing against the Truth, or the Power of *God.* But is there no Way to subdue a wicked Free-Agent, but *by reclaiming him?* Will not the Devil, and all wicked Men, and their sinful and malicious Works, be sufficiently destroy'd, *when Christ shall have put down all Rule, and all Authority and Power,* and subjected them all to an eternal Punishment, and triumphantly made a public Declaration of it? Is not an Enemy *sufficiently* conquered, who is enslaved for ever? What can Almighty Power do more? And does not this shew *God's* perfect Wisdom also; *when he destroys for ever* such disobedient and obstinate Creatures, as resolved not to make Use of the Grace and Opportunity *al-*
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lowed them, to return to their Duty? Does not the Nature of Government require such Justice, as *this*; I mean, the final cutting off of unworthy Members from *all Privilege and Benefit*? And certainly, it is not inconsistent with infinite Purity, to *punish eternally* the incorrigible Perpetrators of Evil.

OUR LORD indeed *came to destroy*, or to *render ineffectual*, (as it ought to be read) *the Works of the Devil*, that is, to prevent the Commission of Sin in Men, and the final Ruin of *human Souls*, both which he (the Devil) greatly and maliciously labours after, in Opposition to GOD and all Goodness: But it was to *destroy them*, not against Reason and Nature; not, by irresistible Force, and unavoidable Compulsion; but, consistently with the Free-Agency and Will of Man, by stronger Reasons and more prevailing Motives, than were ever *brought to light* before; which might powerfully *excite*, and thereby *enable*, them to *resist* the Temptations of Sin, and to *withstand* the Wiles of the Devil, and to *work out* their Salvation with greater Diligence and Circumspection, in Proportion to the more certain Assurance of eternal Life vouchsafed them by his Death and Mediation. *For this purpose was Christ manifested.* But (as I said) Men are still free; and it is naturally in the Power of all *Free-Agents* (or otherwise they could not be *free*) to go against the Purpose GOD: And in that Case Sin and Obstinacy can only be subdued by *being subjected to final Misery and Undoing*; which

which are the *natural*, and *proper*, and even *necessary* Wages thereof. His Purpose is, to destroy *the Works* of the Devil; and this is especially spoken of *Sin* in this World, not in the other: But if they are *not destroyed*, that arises from the Stubbornness and Wilfulness of Man; which therefore for ever after becomes the *just Object* of divine *Wrath*, by having rejected the Opportunity, and forfeited the Promise, of divine *Mercy*.

WHENEVER it is said, that *Death* shall be destroyed, it is always limited by something in the Context to temporal Death *only*: And this Conquest over Death is always represented to be effected thro' *Christ* by the general *Resurrection*. So St. Paul: *And when this Corruptible shall have put on Incorruption, and this Mortal shall have put on Immortality; then shall be brought to pass the Saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in Victory*. So that in all this, there is plainly no Mention of, nor any View at all, to a Release from eternal Death, which is the everlasting Pains of *unrepenting Sinners*.

NOW this Doctrine of endless Punishment being evidently founded, as I think I have proved, on the *Reasons of Things*, and the contrary Opinion utterly repugnant to *Christian Truth*, and destructive of all the Ends and Purposes both of *natural* and *revealed* Religion; it will not, I hope, be thought either presumptuous or dogmatical in me, to advance these Sentiments, tho' against the Opinions of some very *learned, good, and great*

great Men. For they have gone in a *different* Way, and seem to have search'd for Truth on a *mistaken* Ground, which is, that the Texts of Scripture, expressing the wretched State of Sinners in another Life, are to be taken *literally*, in the gross Acceptation of material *Fire* and *Flames*, and such like; which as they are in their own Natures *external*, they have thought them to be purely *positive* Punishments, and must consequently be *entirely dependent* on the Will of GOD; and, that GOD, as he is in his moral Capacity *infinitely* good and merciful, could not *will* such an *implacable* Vengeance, without contradicting and thereby destroying the Perfection of his moral Attributes: whereas those Texts of Scripture are only figurative Expressions, setting forth in the *strongest Light* the intolerable Pains of Eternity, by such sensible Things as are at present most *afflictive* and *tormenting* to us.

'TIS said in the Old Testament, that God *will bring into Judgment, every secret Thing, whether it be Good or whether it be Evil*: But in the plainest and most easy Sense of the Words, this is no more than that every Action of Man, whether done in *private* or in *public*, shall have its *due Recompense* in a future State; which it certainly may, in the Nature of Things, from its own *necessary* Consequence of a good or bad Conscience, either perpetually *accusing*, or else *excusing*, them for so doing; which, as has been already shewn, will be an inexpressible *Pleasure* or
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Torment. And in one of the Prophets it is explicitly so express'd to be, where it is asserted, that *GOD searcheth the Heart, and trieth the Reins, to give to every Man according to his Ways, and according to the Fruit of his Doings.* The *Fruit* of a Man's Doings are nothing but the *natural* Effects of his Life and Conversation, affecting his Soul differently, as his *Ways* have been good or bad. This the Gospel calls rewarding or punishing a Man *according to his Works*, and, *GOD's* rendering *Tribulation and Anguish* to every Soul of Man that doth Evil, and *Glory, and Honour, and Peace* to every Man that doth Good, so far as he does the one or the other; for, *there is no respect of Persons with GOD.* Hence 'tis said, the *impenitent Man treasures up Wrath to himself*; and, the *penitent good Man lays up a good Foundation of Happiness against the Time to come.*

SOMETIMES indeed, Things are said to be done in a more formal and judicial Manner; as, when *the Son of Man* shall set the Good on his right Hand, and the Wicked on his left, and shall assign a Kingdom to the one, and everlasting Fire to the other, prepared from the Foundation of the World, or probably from *GOD's* eternal Design of creating it; for the latter was prepared for the Devils, who, we have Reason to believe, were before the Creation of this lower World. But as, not actually the Government of a Kingdom for the one; so, not the real Torments of Fire for the other; But as a Kingdom sets before

before us in this World the highest Pleasures and Delights, and the Scorplings of *Fire* the greatest Pains and Miseries; so these are (as I have said before) Metaphors of Speech to *figure out* to us, by such material and sensible Objects, to which our Ideas at present can only reach, the ineffable Happiness that shall attend the Good, and the Unhappiness that shall attend the Wicked, *in a future State*.

THIS Doctrine, so explained, makes the *final Judgment* of GOD at the last Day, (which, in the Notion of a *strict* and *formal* Proceeding, and of Rewards and Punishments particularly *assigned* on this Part, and *inflicted* on the other, is incumbred with a thousand Difficulties respecting the Length and Manner of it, as to the hearing, and examining and debating all the various *Actions* and *Circumstances* of Action, of so many millions of millions of Creatures) a plain, easy and intelligible Thing: For this Point being once determined, according to plain Truth and Reason; then, that our Lord *Jesus Christ* should come *in the Clouds of Heaven* with his Saints and Angels, to shew the Honour that the *Father* has done him, *in exalting him* to the right Hand of Power for his Obedience to the Cross for our sakes, seems not only *reasonable* in itself, but even *necessary* to justify his Friends, and to confound his Enemies: And that he shall then publicly *pronounce Judgment*, even in those short Forms of Sentence mentioned in the Gospel, is not highly *improbable*; to which Triumph perhaps refers,

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that of *the Devil's being resolved to the Judgment of the Great Day*, or, I must confess, I know not what it means. But I question not, every Man, conformably to the *Reason* of things, and to many Parts of Holy Scripture, will *naturally* carry his Reward or Punishment in his own Bosom; where it will remain a *Blessing* or a *Curse* to him, for ever and ever: For I reckon GOD himself cannot alter, even the natural Rewards of Virtue, which are *due* to it on eternal Reasons; tho' he may, and will, in *Jesus Christ* superadd to them a *complete Felicity*.

THERE are indeed *many* Expressions in the revealed Will of GOD, that do set forth his Mercy and Loving-kindness to Man in such strong and passionate Terms, (*viz. that he is merciful, gracious, and long-suffering, and of great Goodness; that he delights not in the Death of a Sinner; that he will not always be chiding, neither keepeth he his Anger for ever; and, that he would have none to perish, but that all should come to Repentance*) that one would almost think, GOD could in no Sense, from the *Tenderness* and *Goodness* of his Nature, suffer any of his Creatures to be *long miserable*: But it is to be observed, that all these compassionate Descriptions of GOD's Mercy relate to Man's *Trial* or *Probation* in this World, not to his *Retribution* in the other. This present State is the *Place of Favour*, which a good GOD may reasonably shew to his Creatures, even to the most disobedient, to work their *Reformation*,
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or that *his Long-suffering may lead them to Repentance* : In this Sense, *he shews Mercy to thousands, and from Generation to Generation* ; and frequently checks his Anger, and puts a stop to his Vengeance, and tries again and again by *various Ways and Methods of Compassion* to effect the great End he has before him, Man's *Amendment*, here and his *Salvation* for ever. But the future State is the Place of *Acceptance*, in which a *just* G O D can receive none, nor shew Mercy to any, but on the eternal and immutable Ground of Reason and Equity ; as they have in their *former* State strove with Uprightness and Sincerity, in an undissembled Love of Truth and all Goodness, *to purify themselves as he is pure*, or, in other Words, to imitate the Divine *moral Perfections* in every thing, and to merit, as much as may be, Salvation thro' *Jesus Christ* by a constant and confirm'd Habit of Virtue.

To *this* it is, and thro' *him only*, that the infinite Mercy of God in the World to come relates. There he neither does, nor can, *forgive* any, but on the Terms of the Gospel ; and, consequently, none can be saved *hereafter*, but as they fulfil the Laws of Righteousness *here*, with all Diligence and Circumspection. If a Man continues to the last *irreclaimably* evil, he cannot but be *eternally* miserable : If he repents and renews his Disposition, from the Love of all Sin to the Love of all Good, he cannot but *be saved*, he must be *for ever happy* : not, in the Nature of things, any farther than he approach'd towards *mo-*

ral Perfection; but supernaturally, in a complete and perfect manner, for the sake, or thro' the Merits, of *Jesus Christ*; who died to cleanse the sincerely Good *from all Sin*, that is, from the condemning Power *of all Sin*, even from the inherent Depravity of it, which they were not able altogether to subdue and conquer. The Condition of such is *truly pitiable*, and therefore their Salvation is secure *in Christ*: The wilfully and perversly Wicked deserve *no Pity*, and therefore *perish*.

SOME indeed have thought, for want of considering rightly the Terms of Salvation, that it will be the *general Tenor* of a Man's Life, in the Sense of his having in it more of Good than Evil, or more of Evil than Good, that shall *determine* the Happiness or Misery of his State *hereafter*: But the Question then is, what will be the Fate of those who are as it were in an *Equilibrium* between Good or Evil, or in whom neither the one nor t'other do *at all prevail*? For amidst the many different Degrees of Men in Virtue and Vice, this Case may be *frequently* supposed. Shall such Men have neither Reward nor Punishment, be neither happy or miserable? This is senseless and absurd. The Recourse has therefore been to a *purging Punishment*, as necessary *to burn up* the Dross in these, and even in the end *to consume* the Souls of the desperately Wicked. But this Opinion is so little to the Purpose, that it is neither *philosophical* nor *Christian*. Can spiritual Substances be burnt up, or purged *like Gold*, in a fiery Furnace? What

What Notions must the *Ancients* have had, of Souls, when they thought and wrote in this manner? They might be Men of *Piety*; but not Men of *Reason*.

'Tis true, the more good a Man is now, the more happy he will be hereafter; and the more wicked the more miserable: But 'tis not the Doctrine of *natural* or *revealed* Truth, that a Man shall be saved, for having had in him *more of Good* than Evil; or be damned, for having had *more of Evil* than Good; or be neither saved nor damned, for being in a *Poize* between both. For *one Sin* may damn a Man, as well as a *thousand*: Nay, 'tis possible that one *may* do it, when a thousand *will not*; that is, when these are *repented of*, and the other *wilfully retained*: For 'tis not Sin itself, but the Obstinacy of Sin, that works the Condemnation. *He that thus offends in one Point is guilty of all*, or as much a Transgressor, tho' not so heinous an one, of the Laws of GOD, and will be as surely punish'd for *that one*, as if he broke them *all*. If our *right Hand* or *right Eye*, offend us, that is, if there be in our Hearts *any one* beloved Lust that betrays us into Sin, we must get rid even of that also, *or be cast into Hell-Fire*. In short, every Man will be *naturally* happy or miserable in Proportion to his Works, and to the nature and kind of them; but no Man can be for ever *perfectly* happy thro' *Christ*, but he that, either by Habit or true Repentance, is an Enemy to *all Sin*, and keeps constantly in his Heart a true Love

Love of GOD and *all Goodness*, and in every thing forms his Life and Conversation upon that unshaken Principle.

BUT give me leave to add, before I dismiss this Topic, That tho' I have argued against *positive* Punishments from the Hand of GOD; and do think, that the natural Effects of Sin, in *staining* the Mind, *corrupting* the Will, and thereby *wounding* the Conscience, but especially by its Wilfulness and Obstinacy, are sufficient alone *to torment* the Soul for ever; and might perhaps go farther, and say, GOD *cannot* in Truth and Reason render more unto Sinners than *the Wages of Sin*, than what, I mean, is *naturally* due to every Man, *according to his Works*: Yet it would be against Reason and Scripture to say the same of the *Rewards* of Goodness and Virtue, *i. e.* either that they will not, or cannot be, in a future State, *positive* by the mere Will of GOD, any more than *Punishments*; for GOD may in the Reason of Things be as good, and kind and bountiful to the *just Objects* of his *Mercy* as he pleases, because in so doing he contradicts no moral Property whatever: Whereas to inflict more Punishment upon Sinners than is *naturally* and *properly* due to 'em, would be acting with Injustice, and against the Wisdom and Purity of his divine Government.

ACCORDINGLY, the Scripture always represents *eternal Life* as *freely* given, and *positively* bestowed; No Man can merit it,
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by *any* of, or *all*, his Actions. Naturally every Man must have *perished*; because the Righteousness of the best Men is *vastly deficient*, and any *one Sin* wilfully committed or impenitently retained, is enough to make a Man miserable for ever: But the Joys of Heaven are *the Gift of GOD thro' Jesus Christ*, and St. Paul tells us they are such, as *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man to conceive*. We cannot conceive, what GOD has prepared for them that love him; but if it was only the natural Effects of moral Goodness, such as *Peace of Conscience*, and *Joy in the Holy Ghost*, a good Man might conceive it: And therefore, the future Rewards of Piety and Virtue are not only *natural*, but *positive*; vastly superior to what we as Men *deserve*, and thereby exceedingly fitted to *excite* our Desires of, and Endeavours after, them. All the *Divine Favours* are designed as Spurs to Virtue, but the *Riches* of GOD's Mercy in *Christ* exceed them all, and ought therefore in Proportion to *influence* our Practice; or else, it will greatly *aggravate* our Punishment on the one Hand, as it would *augment* our Reward on the other.

THIS I know is an *intricate* Subject, and has been *variously* handled, but not in every thing to general Satisfaction. Therefore to *settle* my own Thoughts, as well as to *assist* and *direct* others in the pursuit of Truth; I have endeavoured to fix it on *such* a Foundation as I think will *not easily be shaken*. I have

have drawn it down from its eternal Source; the Nature and Reason of Things, on which natural Religion itself is founded; and have explain'd revealed Religion in such a Manner, as touching *this Doctrine*, as to make it entirely agree with *that*, to serve the Ends and Purposes of which all Revelation has been given, *viz. for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness; that the Man of GOD*, that is, all religious and well-disposed Persons, *may be perfect, and thoroughly furnished to all good Works.*

If this be the *right and only proper View* that every Christian Doctrine hath before it, I persuade myself I have proceeded in the *Way of Truth*; as I have plainly shewn, that the Eternity of Hell-Torments *taught and explained* in my Method, tends to *promote* moral Virtue and Goodness, and the other Scheme *to destroy* every Thing good and religious: But of this, let every Man judge for himself.

F I N I S

